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STANFIELD HALL.

BY J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

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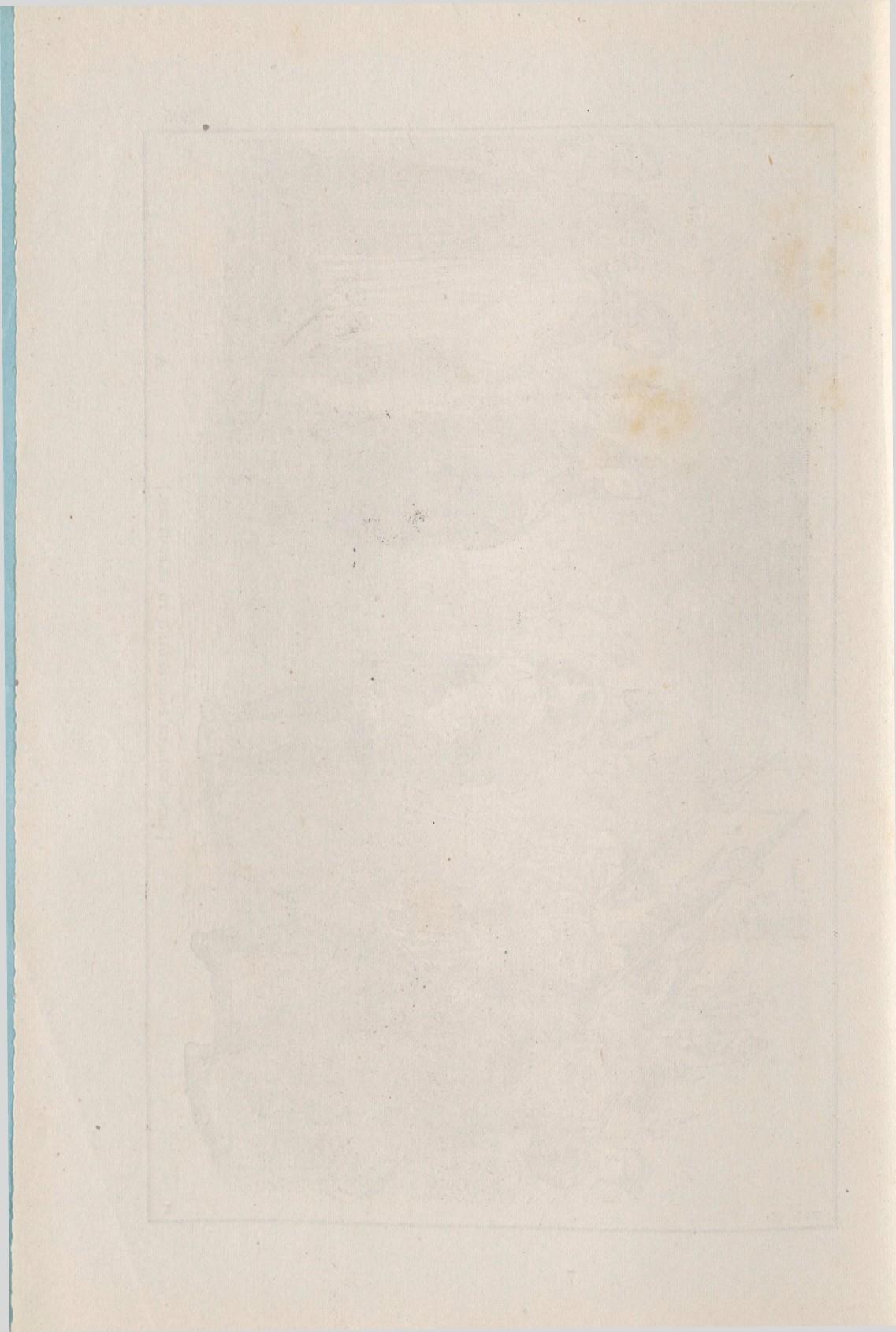
VOL. II.



[ANNE BOLEYN PROCEEDING TO EXECUTION.]

STANFIELD HALL.

305



like vilest merchandise, to the man she loathed—breaking her plighted faith to wear a crown. This faithful friend—faithful upon the rack—was captured, tortured by Anne Boleyn's will. Art thou answered ? ”

“ Patch ! ” exclaimed the conscience-stricken queen.

“ The Lady Salisbury—Pole—” added Louis.

“ Are fearfully avenged,” interrupted Anne. “ Save me ! for I am not fit to die. My soul is charged with such a black account, I fear to sum it o'er. Save me ! ” she almost shrieked, clinging to him in wild alarm, for the light began to gleam through the crevices of the oratory door, showing that the priest was at his post. “ Another minute it will be too late. O ! by your soul's young hope, have mercy ! ”

“ Wolsey ! ” sternly interrupted Louis.

“ As, at your last hour, you trust for mercy ! ”

“ Patch ! ” continued the young man.

“ Lost ! ” said Anne Boleyn, “ lost ! ”

At the same instant the doors of the oratory slowly unfolded, displaying the altar ready lit, and the priest of the Tower waiting to receive her. As she tottered towards him, Louis disappeared through the secret passage. Anne Boleyn and the minister of consolation remained alone.

CHAPTER XX.

ON entering the apartment of the royal captive at an early hour the following morning, Lady Kingston was astonished to find Anne Boleyn kneeling before the altar in the oratory, absorbed in prayer.

“ Alas, madam,” exclaimed the astonished wife of the governor, “ why do I find you here ? Have your friends proved treacherous or weak ? Long ere this I deemed the waters of the deep rose between you and this sad, unhappy day. Know you not—that ?—spare my tongue the rest.”

Here the speaker, who was deeply attached to the condemned queen, burst into tears, and wrung her hands in the impotence of sorrow.

“ I know what you would say,” replied Anne, with a faint smile, “ the day that I must die. If God has willed it so, it were impious to repine. I am glad,” she added, “ the morning is o'ercast and gloomy ; I shall feel less reluctance to meet my doom than if the sun shone brightly and the heavens were rife with balm and music.”

“ Such as the day,” observed Lady Kingston, “ you landed at the Tower previous to your coronation.”

"The day of the month?" exclaimed the captive, turning deadly pale.

"The nineteenth of May."

Three years previously, day for day, in all the flush of beauty and the pomp of royalty, she had been conveyed by her then loving husband from Greenwich to the Tower, previous to her coronation. The coincidence of date was striking, and its contrasts appalled her. Now she was a captive, about to die. For a few moments her fortitude gave way, and pressing her hands to her throbbing temples, she wept the bitter tears of terror and despair.

"To feel the life-blood beating at my heart," she cried, "life in each vein—life in all around—yet know that I must die! Cursed," she continued, "be the hour in which my fatal beauty caught the tyrant's lust, and doubly cursed the folly which believed him, which sold my young heart for an empty pageant! Had I been bleared, deformed, ill-favoured, I might at least have lived securely, though unloved. O Katherine, Katherine! dearly art thou avenged!"

"Madam," said Lady Kingston, "remember you have been a queen."

"And am," continued Anne, proudly. "Let the convenient Cranmer—doubly perjured—dissolve the knot he tied; let venal councils confirm the trickster's sentence; despite them all, I am a queen—queen of a mightier king than Tudor's blood-stained line can boast: the queen of Death."

"Daughter," said the aged priest, rising from the steps of the altar, where he had passed the night with her in prayer, "let not the veils of earth obscure thy view of heaven; let not the regrets, the weak affections, or the heart's strong passions, cause thee to cast one lingering look upon the shore thou art about to quit for ever; direct it rather to that better land where the worn soul, like to some desperate bark tossed on misfortune's sea, may find a haven of repose at last."

At the calm, passionless voice of the chaplain, the bitterness and excitement which had so strongly shaken her became subdued, and Anne Boleyn once more regained a degree of self-possession which, to the last moment, did not again desert her.

"What is the hour?" she demanded of her compassionate friend.

"Nine," replied Lady Kingston.

"And the one appointed for my execution?" added the queen calmly.

"Twelve," sobbed the generous lady. "The Dukes of Norfolk and of Richmond, together with the chancellor and Cromwell, already have arrived. Still there must be hope; the king may yet relent; he cannot shed the blood once so dear to him, rendering his child motherless, and himself a murderer."

The victim faintly smiled. She knew too well the heart of Henry to entertain the least hope of mercy; indeed, for some time she had been haunted with terror, lest he should have executed, in all its horrors, the sentence of the court, which condemned her to be burnt alive—the dread of which alone, it is supposed, induced her to comply with the tyrant's will, and confess a previous contract with Lord Percy, when examined before the primate and several of the peers at Lambeth, which confession was afterwards made the ground of the divorce between Henry and herself. The king, with an inconsistency peculiar to his character, beheaded Anne Boleyn for being faithless to a marriage which Cranmer had just declared to have been no marriage at all.

"Lady Kingston," said the queen, "I have a request—I will not say which you must grant; but which, if dying words have weight, or gentle thoughts of pity dwell in woman's heart, you will not refuse me."

The party thus adjured could only answer by her tears. The speaker understood them, and, taking her by the hand, led her to the canopied chair of state, which still remained in the apartment—for to the last the prisoner was treated as a queen—and, after some resistance, forced her to seat herself in it.

Lady Kingston was surprised; and the priest looked on her with an inquiring eye.

"When you shall see the Lady Mary, Katherine's injured child," exclaimed Anne, "do, in my name, as I do now." Here she cast herself upon her knees before the chair. "And as you shall answer to God for the fidelity of your promise, repeat my very words:—In His name who suffered for us all, I ask her pardon for the wrongs she has received. I sue for it in her sainted mother's name. Paint to her my tears and my remorse, my woman's agony and shame, my fall and fearful death; nor rise till she relents."

"The bitterness of death indeed is past," exclaimed the chaplain of the Tower, "when thou hast gained this victory o'er thy heart; that once subdued, all that remains is easy."

At this moment there were three distinct knocks at the door of the apartment. Lady Kingston started from the chair of state and turned deadly pale. A noise at the same moment was heard, as if from the weeping of women in the ante-chamber. Anne calmly seated herself in the vacated seat, and motioned to the priest to unbar the door.

The dukes of Norfolk and Richmond, together with the nobles deputed by Henry to witness her last moments, were announced by Sir William Kingston, whose countenance was unusually grave.

"Admit them," said the captive, calmly.

"Will not your majesty first be served?" demanded the governor.

"I have supped," said Anne, "on angels' food, and will not

break my fast again on earth. I hear," she added, "that I am not to die till noon. I regret it; by this time I had thought to have been past all pain."

"Fear not for the pain, madam," said Sir William, respectfully; "it will be no pain—it is so sottle" (quick.)

"Fear!" repeated Anne; "I have no fear. I have heard that the executioner is very quick. Besides," she added, "I have a little neck—it will soon be over."

And clasping her hands about it, she laughed heartily.

The above trait of levity, at such an awful moment, would scarcely have been believed, had not the governor of the Tower recorded it in a letter to Cromwell, which is still extant.

The lords commissioners now entered the chamber. Despite his effrontery, the Duke of Norfolk, Anne's unworthy uncle, who had condemned her, could not meet the eye of his injured kinswoman. The Duke of Richmond, Henry's illegitimate son, appeared overwhelmed with grief. He was young; and the unhappy queen, in the days of her influence and prosperity, had ever treated him with kindness. The chancellor and Cromwell were cold and impassible as usual.

Anne motioned to them that she was prepared to hear them.

"Marchioness of Pembroke," began the chancellor.

"Marchioness of Pembroke!" repeated Anne, her countenance suddenly flushed with virtuous indignation.

"Such," continued the chancellor, "is your fitting title, since the ecclesiastical courts have declared your marriage with his majesty the king null and void."

"Marchioness, then," said Anne, with a bitter smile. "Pray proceed."

The great law officers of the crown proceeded to read the parchment, which bore the great seal of England. By it the king pardoned her death by the stake, to which she had been originally condemned, and changed the sentence into beheading.

"If Marchioness of Pembroke," said Anne, when he had concluded, "the sentence affects not me; it is as Henry's wife alone that I can be condemned. Knaves!" she added, "sorry knaves! do you not see your malice but defeats its vile intent, and justifies mine innocence in this?"

The addressing of the speaker as marchioness had been a gratuitous piece of insolence on the part of Lord Audley, the chancellor, who was strongly attached to the party of Katherine, and who had laboured hard to induce the king to pass the Act which subsequently declared the Princess Elizabeth illegitimate, thereby placing both of Henry's daughters on an equal footing. The calm reply of the queen was too forcible to be overlooked. From that moment to the last of her existence the commissioners never omitted to address her as queen.

"You have heard the merciful intentions of the king," said Norfolk, harshly, "and we are here to see them carried into execution."

"Your fitting office, my kind uncle, would have been the executioner's; but pray proceed."

"In an hour," added Richmond, "we shall attend your grace."

"You will find me ready, my good lord; my spirit longs to cast earth's garments off. Mine enemies this night may envy me my sleep. I presume my women may attend me?"

The commissioners bowed assent, and demanded if she had any further request to make which their duty to the king or the strict letter of their instructions would enable them to grant.

"Nothing."

"In an hour, then, we will attend your grace."

"An hour."

And the commissioners, struck by her dignity of manner and firm bearing, bowed, as they left the chamber, with a respect deeper perhaps than they had shown in her days of pride and power.

The precincts of the White Tower were crowded by persons of all ranks and ages to behold the fearful tragedy about to be consummated. Amongst the common people an idea prevailed that the sentence would never be carried into execution. Amongst the Catholics, we regret to say that many were present to glut their hatred by witnessing the execution of a woman whose elevation had been not only fatal to their interests, but destructive to their faith. Many thought that with Anne Boleyn's death the days of the Reformed faith were counted; but Henry and his parliament too keenly appreciated the sweets of plunder to forego the spoliation. Many of the Reformers were also gathered there, gazing with anxious faces on the gloomy scaffold hung with black, and its dread paraphernalia, the block, the axe, and the masked executioner.

"How old Kate," observed a fellow who, by dint of squeezing, had obtained a place directly opposite to the scaffold, "must chuckle in her grave at Peterborough at this morning's work! The fall of the axe will be enough to startle even her earth-plugged ear. Her rival has not long enjoyed her crown."

"Longer than she will enjoy one in heaven," muttered an old woman near him. She had been a sister of the convent at Eltham, and, like many others of her order, on the suppression of the house, cast inhumanly upon the world, to beg or starve, by Henry's vicegerent Cromwell, whose rapacity was only equalled by the infamy of the means by which he gratified it. As we before stated, he was one of the commissioners appointed to witness the death of the unhappy queen. He little thought, as he walked proudly through the court-yard of the Tower, that the next procession he would figure in there would be to his own execution.

Although he had been Wolsey's secretary, he had not learnt this truth : that the further you advance in royal favour, the more slippery the path becomes.

By the ramparts, close to the archway leading to the royal lodgings, where the prisoner had been kept, were several courtiers and gentlemen, who were either in attendance on the commissioners, or had made interest with the authorities to witness the procession, which they were as eager to behold as their descendants, our modern aristocracy, used to be to witness a hanging match at Newgate. The bell of the chapel of the Tower announced that they were about to be gratified.

First walked a strong body of the trainbands, headed by their respective officers ; for rumours of an attempt at rescue had been rife in the City for several days, and Sir William Kingston had taken his precautions. He little knew how nearly the sympathy or weakness of his lady had succeeded in defeating them.

Next came the commissioners in their robes of state, followed by the Lord Mayor of London—the same who had so boldly declared upon her trial that the only thing he could understand from the proceedings was, that everybody wanted to get rid of her—king, witnesses, and judges. He walked with a discontented air, as ill satisfied with the part he was compelled to take in the doleful pageant, for the young queen had been a favourite with the City.

The civic functionary was succeeded by a party of the yeomen of the guard, dressed in the same quaint costume in which we behold them at the present day, with the arms and cipher of Henry VIII. embroidered on their backs and breasts ; as usual, they bore their long gilt partisans.

Sir William Kingston, governor of the Tower, bareheaded, and bearing his staff of office, followed next ; but all eyes were fixed upon the queen, who, dressed in black velvet, her features partially veiled by the sombre drapery which fell from her lovely head, walked firmly after him. In her right hand she held a book of prayers, the same which she afterwards gave to a sister of Sir Thomas Wyat, who attended to disrobe her on the scaffold, which was for many years guarded as a relic by the poet's descendants.

There was neither fever nor excitement in the victim's face ; she appeared neither awed by the thronging multitude, nor weakly cast down by the approach of death ; an air of holy resignation showed that, as the aged priest had predicted, the sting of death was really past : a martyr going to the stake could not have looked more beautiful or more resigned.

As the mournful procession passed along many an eye was dimmed with tears ; men remembered her charity, and contrasted the splendour of her past existence with the terror of the present hour. Even the more Catholic portion of the spectators, who looked upon her as the primeval cause of the downfall of the

ancient faith in England, changed the half-muttered curse and smile of triumph to a look of commiseration and a parting prayer.

Arrived at the foot of the scaffold, the halberdiers divided, and the victim mounted with a firm step the fatal stairs. A chair, covered with black cloth, had been placed for her reception, in which she seated herself, whilst her weeping female attendants ranged themselves at the back. Every tower and parapet of the old fortress, that regal den of blood and crime, was lined with spectators entranced by the interest and horror of the scene. A queen was about to die—a criminal or a martyr, according as men judged her, about to appear before the throne of Him to whom the heart and its deep mysteries are as an open page. Faithful to his mission, the aged priest, bearing the crucifix, stood beside her, whispering the last consolation—the parting prayer—in her sad ears ; whilst Sir William Kingston read, in a deep voice, the warrant for her execution, and concluded with the usual formula of “God save the king !” Not one voice in that breathless, vast assemblage, echoed him ; and of the commissioners, the obsequious Duke of Norfolk alone bowed his head ; Richmond was drowned in tears, and the chancellor occupied in whispering the orders to the executioner.

“ See that your axe is sharp and your arm steady,” he muttered to the gaunt figure who, clothed in scarlet, watched, with professional indifference, the scene in which he was to perform so dreadful a part, and at which so many were drowned in tears.

“ Fear not, my lord,” replied the headsman ; “ Hugo of Calais never yet struck twice.”

The assurance was not altogether an idle boast. The speaker, who was the public executioner of Calais, at that time an English possession, had been sent for expressly to perform his disgusting office on account of his dexterity. He was as unmoved at the beauty and rank of his victims as the senseless block against which his axe was placed.

As soon as the reading of the fatal document was finished, Anne rose from her chair, and briefly addressed the noblemen around her. Her voice was silvery and clear ; and so hushed were the spectators, that it was heard by nearly all the numerous assembly.

“ I am come,” she said, “ to die as I am judged by law. I accuse none, nor say anything of the grounds upon which I am judged.” Falling on her knees, she added : “ Father of all, be gracious to that most merciful and pious prince my husband. He hath been to me a good and gentle lord, full of kindness and forbearing.” Rising, she expressed a wish that if anyone would meddle in her cause they would judge it for the best, and concluded by entreating all present to pray for her, and her friends to pardon her if she had not always showed them as much kindness as her means enabled her to do.

Whether this was an acknowledgment of her guilt, or a penance imposed on her proud heart by the consciousness of her treachery to Katherine and Wyat, as an atonement for her broken vows to her husband or her lover, is a question now almost impossible to decide, every minute of her trial having been carefully destroyed by her enraged husband or her crafty daughter Elizabeth.

These words, which are historical, leave her advocates in one of two dilemmas—that she was either a wanton or a hypocrite. Who shall decide?

One of her women, the sister of the poet Wyat—the only man whom perhaps she had ever sincerely loved—half drowned in tears, approached to render her the last sad offices; Anne had herself selected her for the occasion.

“Courage,” she whispered, with a placid smile, at the same time placing her manuscript prayer-book, which was set in gold and enamelled black, in her hands.

The attendant knew for whom it was intended.

Her women now removed the long black veil which, like a sombre cloud, shaded her pale face; at which moment a sickly gleam of sunshine broke forth and fell upon her countenance, never more beautiful, perhaps, than at that hour; her long fair locks fell on her neck—that hair, so lately hung with gems, amid whose silken curls the wanton fingers of her cruel husband so oft had strayed.

A groan of anguish burst from the crowd as Mary Wyat gathered those curls in her fingers, and twisted them tightly round the victim’s head.

The executioner quietly removed the axe, on which he had hitherto been leaning, from the block, and coolly passed his practised fingers along the edge as if to reassure himself of its sharpness. A shudder ran through the crowd: they felt that the last fearful scene of a dismal tragedy was approaching.

One of her women offered her an embroidered handkerchief to bind her eyes, which Anne rejected with a motion of her hand, and advanced firmly towards the block, declining all support. As she passed that portion of the scaffold where her uncle the Duke of Norfolk was standing, she paused for an instant, and her brow became suddenly flushed; it was but a momentary weakness; a glance from the aged priest, who walked beside her, holding the crucifix to her view, recalled her to herself. The hour for all human resentment was past; and she continued her way, uttering, as she moved along: “Pray for me! Pray for me!”

Kneeling upon the cushion placed for her at the foot of the block, she prayed long and fervently. Her last words were: “To Christ I commend my spirit!” In this hope she died, for her soul accompanied her parting prayer to the judgment seat of heaven. The words had scarcely passed her lips than she bowed her head;

an arm was raised, and the swift flashing of steel seen in the air. A dull heavy sound followed, and all was over.

The executioner kept his boast : there was no occasion to strike twice.

Thus was ended a life of much celebrity and of great importance in the annals of this country. A few hours afterwards the body of this once idolised woman, whom Henry had risked his kingdom to obtain, was thrown into a common chest made of elm tree, used for the purpose of keeping arrows, and buried in the chapel of the Tower.

Tradition still points out the mound at Richmond where Henry went alone to watch for the signal which announced that he was once more free to wed, which he did with Jane Seymour in the course of the very week in which her predecessor suffered decapitation, Henry having first testified his indifference to the horrible event which had occurred by wearing white as mourning for *one day*.

The remains of the once gay Anne were scarcely conveyed to their resting-place, than a bark, which had for several days been lying near the Tower stairs, left its moorings, and glided slowly down the river. Patch, Walter, and Louis d'Auverne, who had witnessed the execution, were on the deck. The former, whose agency had been so fatal to the queen, was pacing it in moody silence. Vainly he argued with himself that he had but avenged his friend and master by an act of justice. His own wrongs and sufferings he thought not of. He felt, perhaps for the first time in his life, dissatisfied with his conduct, and wished that he had left the task of vengeance unto Him who has so solemnly declared that it is His.

Walter, who read what was passing in the mind of his friend, forbore to interrupt him ; he felt that there were moments when the heart is fitted only for its own communings, when even the voice of friendship falls distastefully on the ear, and consolation appears like mockery. Louis d'Auverne, on the contrary, needed consolation ; the momentary excitement which had induced him, at the last hour, to defeat the projects of the Reformers with respect to the escape of Anne, had passed away, and he trembled like a child at the idea of encountering his friend Everil, whose strong mind had subjugated his.

" Yet it was to avenge my father," he murmured ; " and if a weakness, Heaven will surely pardon it."

The voyage to Antwerp, from which they had now been absent several months, occupied them nearly five days, for the wind was against them. Oh, with what eagerness did Walter contemplate once more folding Mary in his arms ! and, as the stately towers of the queen-like city rose in sight, his heart beat wilder and wilder with anticipated happiness ; he dreamt not that, during his absence,

a serpent had entered the abode of peace, and that the infection of its venom had already corrupted the source of his bliss—the life of his young bride.

The jester and Louis could scarcely keep pace with him as he threaded the crowded quays. A few minutes brought the impatient lover to the house in the Grand Place, where he had left his treasure under the trusty care of Sir Richard Everil. The heart of the young husband sank within him as the servant—a faithful Fleming whom he had engaged—opened the gate of the old-fashioned mansion on his approach. There was not a smile upon the honest creature's countenance, nor even a look of satisfaction at his return.

"What has happened?" faltered Walter.

A tear fell from the eye of the domestic; his heart was too full to speak; he could only point to the marble staircase which led to the apartments. Our hero staggered rather than walked up the steps, followed by Louis and the jester, and made his way to the chamber of his wife.

Reduced almost to a shadow by suffering and sickness, upon a low couch reclined the once graceful form of the heiress of Stanfield. Shortly after the departure of her husband her appetite had gradually failed her, and burning pains in the chest consumed her; every breath of air she drew seemed like a flame, or a stream of burning oil poured on her exhausted lungs. The only nourishment she could be prevailed upon to taste was fruit, which the *affectionate care* of the Lady Inez constantly supplied her with. Indeed, during the absence of Walter, the beautiful Spaniard had scarcely ever been absent from her side; and so attached had the grateful invalid become, that she would take the orange or raisin from her hands when she rejected them from all beside.

"Could I but once more behold him," murmured the confiding girl, speaking of her husband to the lovely fiend who was seated by her side, "I could die happy then. Methinks," she added, "my brow would not ache reclined upon his breast. I could brave death if it found me in his arms."

The exhausted sufferer fixed her glassy eyes with so mournful an expression of confidence and love on her supposed friend, that even she, hardened as she was in a career of crime, felt a passing pang. Mary observed the changing colour of her cheek, and deeming it the unspoken pledge of sympathy for her sad fate, repaid her for it with a sister's kiss, which the fiend returned. Strange to say, it left no blister on her victim's cheek.

"Try, dearest," she whispered, soothingly, at the same time pressing upon the invalid the half of a pomegranate—the native, like herself, of sunny Spain, where treachery is veiled beneath smiles, and poison imparted by a kiss—"it will moisten your parched lips, and cool the burning pain you speak of."

Just as Mary was about to place the treacherous gift to her lips, the sound of a hasty step was heard upon the stairs. With a strength which surprised herself, she started from her recumbent position. She knew the tread—the instinct of affection told her whose was the impatient foot. With a scream of joy, she rushed across the room as Walter entered it, and sank into his arms. For a long time she remained insensible to the tears which fell upon her brow, or the warm kisses on her burning cheek.

Patch, who had followed his friend, observed that on their entrance the governor's wife turned deadly pale, and dropped the pomegranate in her agitation and surprise. He made no remark, but quietly stooped for it and conveyed it to his doublet before she recovered from the confusion into which their arrival had thrown her, or, indeed, before anyone had observed the action.

It is impossible to describe the grief and despair of Walter as he hung over the emaciated form of his idolised wife. His agony was too deep for words ; he could only look upon her, press her to his heart, and reproach himself that even for a moment he had wandered from her side. At each fresh burst of passionate sorrow the now comparatively happy Mary would reply to him "that all was well, that death had lost its terrors, since she encountered it in his embrace."

"Angel ! " sobbed the husband, with a burst of love and agony ; " death shall not divide us : the same blow kills us both."

The sensitive feelings of the governor's lady were so excited by the sorrows of the youthful pair that she was compelled to return to her palace. She made her adieu with her hypocritical face bathed in tears, and uttering vows for the speedy restoration of her sweet friend. The jester followed her with a cold, observant eye, and shortly afterwards left the house. The illness of the Lady Mary was too sudden and too rapid in its fearful progress to be the result of natural causes. Of that Patch felt convinced, and he determined to consult an old friar of the Dominican convent, renowned for his skill in chemistry, a Father Rimeriez, a native of Spain, but whose life had been passed in exploring the antiquities and learning of the East.

Patch related the object of his visit, described the altered appearance of the Lady Mary, her glassy eyes, attenuated form, and pale transparent complexion ; but without, at the same time, uttering a word of his suspicions.

" How long," demanded Rimeriez, " is it since her husband left her in health ? "

" About four months," replied his visitor.

" Poisoned ! " said the priest.

Such was the jester's own opinion. Without a word, he drew from his pocket the piece of pomegranate, and placed it in the chemist's hand.

The man of science perfectly understood its meaning. Placing it on a marble slab, he carefully divided it into four pieces, one of which he dropped into a glass filled with spirits of wine, and kept adding portions of various liquids; but still no visible change was produced: the contents retained their colour.

"It is by no vegetable poison," he exclaimed, "or I should have discovered it. Umph! we have to do with no common bungler in the trade of death."

A different course of operation was tried, but without success. The contents of the test-tube remained unchanged.

"Nor by mineral poison either," murmured the operator, slightly vexed at the skill which defied even his experienced eye to detect it. Suddenly recollecting himself, he placed the apparatus on the table, and opening a cabinet, drew from it a manuscript written in Eastern characters upon vellum, and for nearly an hour remained poring over the contents, Patch watching him all the while with curious eye; for the old man's countenance was a study, now flashing with intelligence when he had obtained, as he thought, some clue; now puzzled and embarrassed when the thread escaped him. With a quiet smile of satisfaction he closed the page at last, and returned it to its resting-place.

"Have you succeeded?" demanded his visitor.

The old man nodded, as much as to say, Be patient—we shall see. Taking up one of the remaining pieces of the pomegranate, he placed it upon a plate of hardened metal, and brought a couple of wires which hung from a coil in the ceiling in contact with it.

Going into a closet adjoining his cell, the worthy monk set some machine in motion, for Patch could distinctly hear the revolutions of a wheel. With the interest and almost the affection of a father hanging over a sick child, the man of science watched the result. Suddenly a succession of brilliant flashes, so intense that the eye could scarcely support them, parted from the pomegranate, and the metal plate was melted into a shapeless mass.

"Ah! I thought so!" exclaimed the monk, in a voice of triumph—"poisoned by the powder of diamonds."

"Art sure?" demanded the jester.

"Sure!" repeated the monk, with a scornful smile.

"And is there no hope—no remedy to arrest the fatal poison in its mad career—to recall the light to the exhausted eye—the blush of health to the wan cheek and wasted form?"

The old man shook his head doubtfully.

"The poison," he observed, "was used chiefly in the East; its tests were known but to few; even he, so virulent was the poison, was not sure that he possessed an antidote; but he would try—he would try."

After various manipulations, he placed a small phial, filled with a dark green liquid, in his bosom, and drawing his cowl over his

thin, parchment-like features, started to accompany his visitor to the house of Sir Richard Everil, first carefully locking the door of the chamber, which was at once his cell and laboratory. They soon arrived there.

The Lady Mary was still upon the couch, her head resting on her husband's breast, and her hand clasped in his, when Patch and his companion entered the apartment. She could only welcome her old friend with a smile. Upon the monk she gazed with an air of resignation ; she thought he had been sent for to administer the last offices of religion. A life pure as hers had been had not much preparation to require, or many sins to confess ; her heaviest crimes were but the weaknesses of a virtuous heart—such sins as make angels smile when they record them.

"You need not leave me," she murmured ; "I have no thought, no action of my life, I would conceal from you."

This was whispered in Walter's ear, who turned with an inquiring, piteous look towards his friend.

"It is not a confessor I have brought with me," said Patch, struggling to maintain his firmness, "but a physician, lady—one whose skill gives hope."

"Hope," said the sufferer, faintly ; "too late, too late—my last hope has passed, and almost my last regret," she added, turning her eyes with a look of undying love towards Walter, "since I expire in my husband's arms."

Without uttering a word, the monk advanced and felt her pulse. Through his long life women had been to him but as the zoophytes, minerals, polypi, or any other production of nature which came within his way—things to be examined, classed, and forgotten ; but the sweetness and patience of Mary amidst the fearful agonies which he knew she must endure interested him ; and he resolved, if human skill could avail, that the grave should be disappointed of its prey.

Motioning to Patch to reach him a silver goblet from the manchet table, he filled it with the mixture he had so carefully compounded, and offered it to his patient to drink ; she would have refused, but the imploring look of Walter, who clung to it as his last hope, and the tearful eye of the jester, restrained her. For their sakes she determined to endure the agony of another draught, for it must be observed that the only moisture which for weeks had passed her burning lips had been the fruit with which the perfidious Inez presented her : liquid was, in any shape, like a draught of molten lead.

No sooner had she swallowed the contents of the goblet than the change in her appearance became terrific ; her hair bristled with the agony, which caused the cold, damp perspiration to stream at every pore, and her chest heaved as though the swelling heart would burst its marble prison. So intense were the pains and throbbings, that Walter at one time thought her strained eye-balls

would have burst from their burning sockets. Unable to endure their horrible expression, he covered them with his hand, and sobbed like a child as he wiped the blood-tinged froth from her quivering lips.

The monk, who witnessed the effect of his potion regardless of her sufferings, rubbed his hands in quiet satisfaction. He knew that there was hope.

"God!" said Walter, "she is dying!"

"Nonsense," said the man of science; "she is too strong to die yet. See how bravely she bears up against the spasm. I knew it would succeed; I knew it must succeed."

At this instant, with a shriek of pain which no resolution could suppress, the object of his solicitude sank upon the couch, to all appearance senseless; her husband thought that she was dead, but the friendly monk once more reassured him.

"In a few moments you will perceive her returning breath," exclaimed the man of science, "but faint, as if exhaling from the lungs of a new-born child. Watch her as men watch the thing they love, the hope they live for. If in three hours the spasm does not return she is saved."

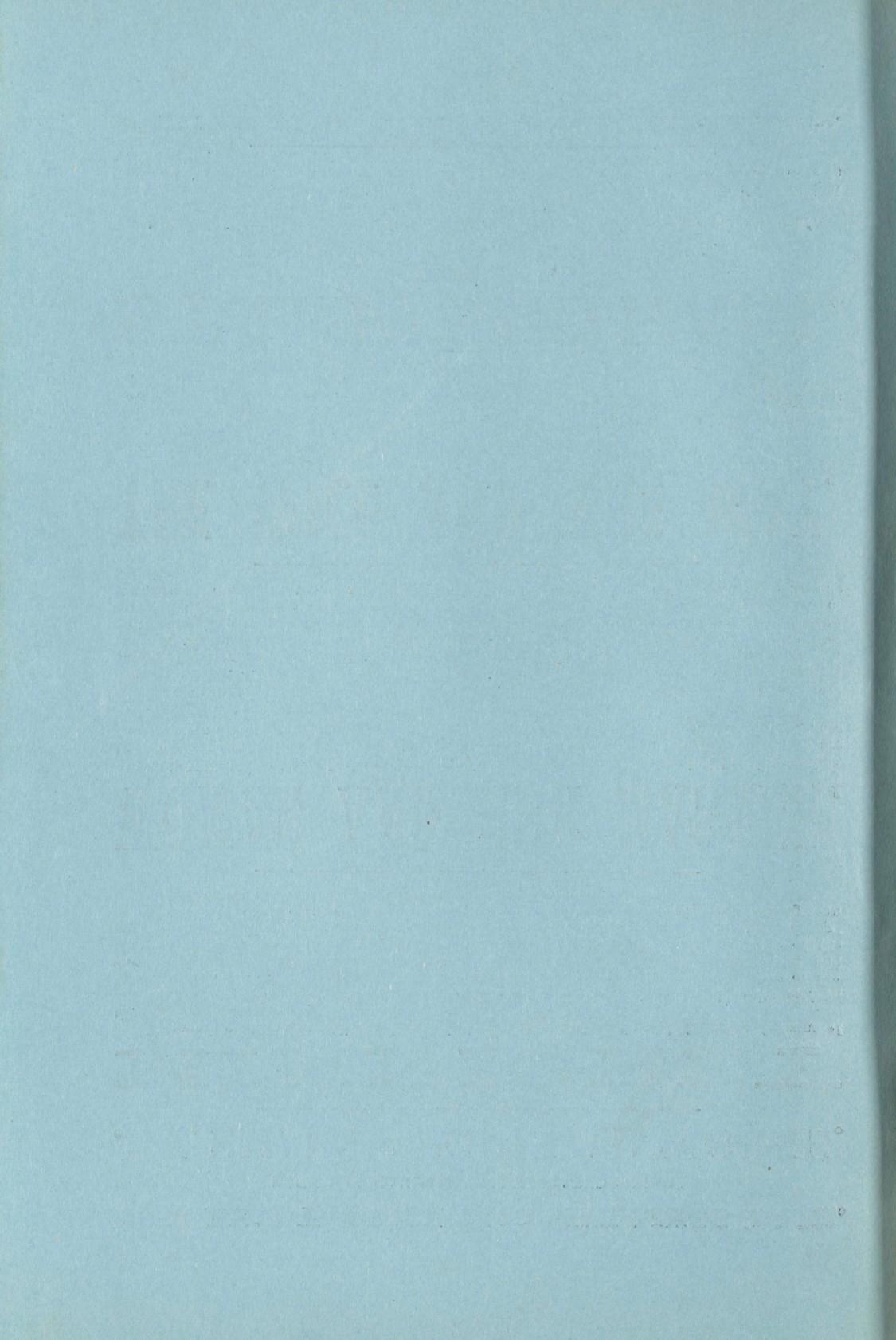
"Saved!" iterated Walter, scarcely daring to trust his ears with the blest assurance.

"Saved," repeated the monk, gravely; "the agonies you have witnessed were occasioned by the solution of the poison which, like a thousand serpents' fangs, was preying upon her frame."

"Poison!" shrieked the astonished husband. "Breathes there a wretch whose malice could engender such a monstrous crime? Name the fiend, that I may avenge humanity's insulted form, and tread the monster's heart out! Poison!" he added, wildly; "who could have envied bliss like ours, or sought to change it to such dark despair as reason shrinks to contemplate?"

"Leave that to me," said the jester, sternly. "*I am the Lady Mary's best avenger.*"

He kept his word.



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